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—Quæ perpetuò sunt agitata, manent.
JAN. VIT.

The restless billows of the people still
Remain, to all futurity revealed.

THE progress of improvement is in nothing marked so strongly as in the little accounts we find from time to time of popular customs, public conveniences, or even common amusements. When the voice of history fails; when the annals of nations are silent, and the record of conquests achieved and glories acquired is deficient, these

apparently trifling circumstances stamp at once the character of the age, exhibit the advancement or retrogression of civilised society, and point out how the nations whose customs are thus recorded proceeded in the march of mind, & the triumphs of intellect. The river that seems lost amid overhanging & entangled forests, is traced from the road side by the casual glimpses of its waters; and the eye that is accustomed to mark the history of man, beholds him in his true colors only by these occasional gleams of almost forgotten lustre.

It has often been remarked, that had the philosophers and historians of antiquity alone survived the wreck of ages, we should have remained in total ignorance of the manners and character of those who then existed. We should have looked back on them, as on a splendid picture, whose brilliancy of coloring conceals its defects, and we should have been induced to

ascribe a higher degree of general refinement than was justly merited. It is by the hints, and allusions, continually scattered through the writings of the poets and comedians of those days, that we are enabled to arrive at a probable estimate of the state of public morals, manners, and refinement.

Nor are these remarks to be confined to those illustrious eras. In every nation the same is to be observed; and the attentive observer will glean from the lighter writers of progressive ages what he could never have attained by historical deduction. Those very works, which seemed at the time they were written as of little or no importance, have often been snatched from the wreck of the past, to inform us of what once existed; and to tell us those particulars, which profounder writers disdained to enumerate. The childish verses of a rhymer, the insipid diary of a monk, have often redeemed from oblivion the memory of manners and customs long since

discontinued, or have thrown light upon institutions now existing, which would else have been dark as to their origin, and lost in that mist of obscurity which envelopes more or less every thing of an old date.

The man whose leisure gave him opportunities for thus employing himself, would find it an amusing and an instructive task to glean the little facts we have been speaking of, as well from these obsolete remains, as from the long succession of bards & dramatists in the English language from its infancy to the present time. He would behold distinctly displayed the progressive march of a nation from barbarism to high refinement; from a deep degradation of intellect, to the acquisition of all that adorns & embellishes the human mind. We may certainly argue something of the barbarity of the age, when a monk in the reign of Stephen very gravely describing the sports of the young men of Lon-

don, thus sets forth that now so common a practice of children — sliding: — "When the great Moor," says he, "which washes Moorfields, at the north wall of the city, is frozen over, great companies of young men go to sport on the ice; then taking a run, & setting their feet at a distance, and their bodies sideways, they slide a great way." We smile at the simplicity of the relation, and wonder at first that a custom so universal now should have been then considered as an exploit worthy of being recorded; but when we remember the date of the writing, our wonder ceases, and we feel a degree of pleasure in perusing a little incident so characteristic of the manners of the age.

In the same manner we are to arrive at a definite idea of the progress in refinement & intellect of every period of history. It is not our intention, nor would it be consistent with the ~~pla~~ objects of our paper, to fill the essay with a

compilation of anecdotes which might probably be already familiar to most of our readers. We barely state the general facts, leaving it to their knowledge & research to make the particular application.

Perhaps the essayists of Britain will not be the less valuable for containing so much information on the current manners of the day, when ages may have rolled their sleepy torrents by. In them the enquirer of future days will find a store of local information, and of allusion to the customs, fashions, and ideas, prevalent in the periods at which they wrote, which will materially assist him in arriving at a just conception of the days that shall have past. They contain neither the simple relations of monkish imbecillity, nor the half-understood references of the poets; they present on the contrary a lively picture of the manners as they fleet along, pourtraying with undeviating exact-

nep, their changes and their appearance. They record the virtues, but stamp in characters of unfading infamy the vices of each age. The labors that assisted to reform the follies of the day when they appeared, will hand down to succeeding generations a faithful picture of the past; and while they remain, splendid monuments of the talents of their authors, they instruct those who may live hereafter to avoid the follies and shun with horror the vices so depicted with so much fidelity.

If then, popular manners and customs are thus to be handed down to posterity, does it not behove us to make every possible exertion, both in an individual and collective capacity, to improve our morals, & refine our taste? It is impossible in the present state of things that any civilised nation can so far shroud itself to the future in the gloom of obscurity and uncertainty,

as to preserve the distinguishing, nay even the peculiar & individual traits of the character of its people, unknown to posterity. No Goth or Vandal could now sweep to destruction the records of learning, & the labors of the press. No second age of barbarism could now overshadow the world, leaving us as bright examples to future empires, who could not pierce the ~~veil~~ darkness of the past to discover our defects. The invention of printing has enstampt upon human action all the perpetuity that earth can bestow; and no attacks of ignorance, no assaults of superstition, of warlike ferocity, or brutal disregard to every thing in the shape of art or science, refinement or ornament, could be able to destroy the proud and invincible bulwark which learning has now reared; before which the boast of antiquity must yield, & to which the future can only add, without being able to diminish an atom of its splendor.

The love of fame, the desire of retaining honor, even when the things of this life are past, and the grave has embosomed every hope and every fear, is natural to all. An individual will often be restrained from gross violations of propriety, merely by this grand principle of the human character. The eye of ambition looks forward to the time when his name may be had in reverence when his ashes are mouldered to the dust; & recalls the example of the mighty bard of old, whose name a world venerates, though his sepulchre is unknown and undistinguished from the rest of earthly dust; watered by unconscious showers, and warmed by the unmindful sun for thousands of revolutions. But it is seldom that we see a <u>public</u> possessed of this ambition. They seem content to be handed down to posterity, either in the slumberous posture of ignorance and barbarity, or in the more revolting garb

of folly and of crime. They seem indifferent whether the landmarks of their reputation stamp them with infamy or with renown. They roll their turbulent tide along, mocking at the follies of ages that have past, but neglecting to endeavor to leave behind themselves something more ennobling.

With regard to the mass of the populace, this is not at present to be remedied. But the writers of each succeeding age ought certainly to endeavor so far to inform their fellow-beings, as to leave a good impression to posterity. They should be cautious of perpetuating the follies of a moment, and of loading with infamy the period in which they write. A little care would prevent them from transgressing in this manner the rules of good policy; but no hand shall in future blot out the infamy of the past, or palliate its follies or its excesses. Let them inculcate the great lessons of religion and of virtue. Let Satire drop its grossness, and rather

tell men what they ought to be, than what they precisely are.

But the task we fear is difficult. We are aware that our feeble efforts can do nothing towards its accomplishment; and we must be content to behold the same cares still run, unless a beam from above should animate the sluggish mass, and by filling it with the seeds of pure & holy conduct, ensure at once the esteem of posterity, and the favor of heaven.

E.

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